

Use assets to boost tourism, Shanxi urged



Cultural treasures like Yungang Grottoes and beauty spots have enormous economic power, say experts

By YUAN SHENGGAO

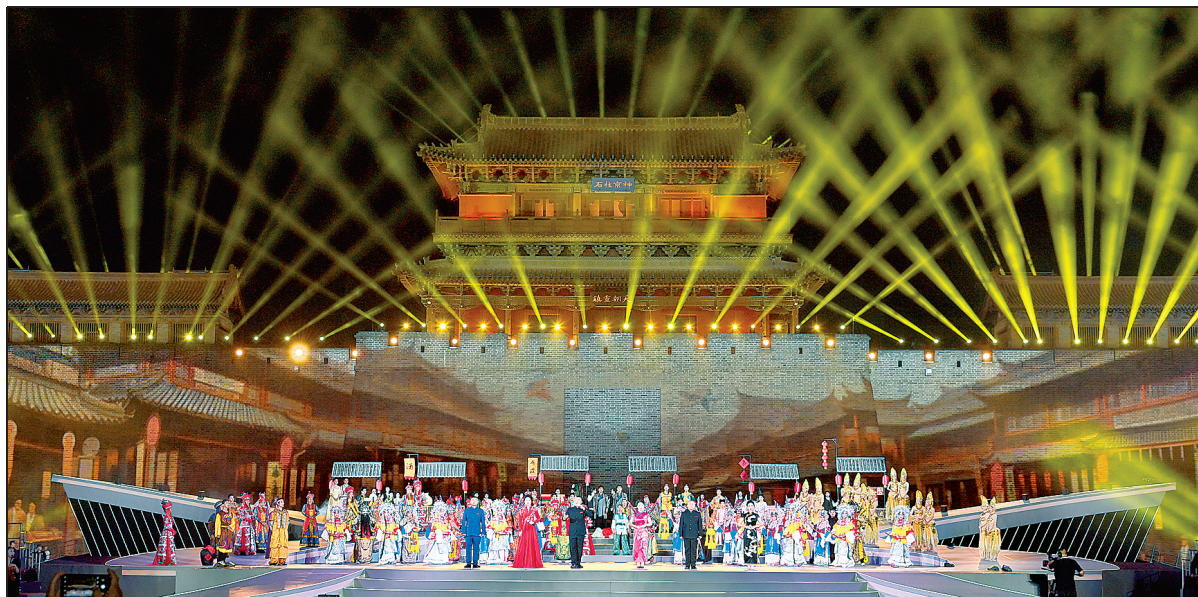
Shanxi — the North China province with a remarkable number of historical assets and intangible cultural heritage items — should rely on the integration of tourism and culture to make itself a famous destination, according to experts and industry insiders during a recent conference.

The event, the ninth Shanxi Tourism Development Conference, was held on June 26-28 in the northern Shanxi city of Datong, attracting people from home and abroad.

Shanxi is famous throughout the country for its rich tourism resources. These include 531 historical and cultural sites on the national list for protection, six national-level scenic areas and 21 national forest parks.

The province's landmark attractions, like the Yellow River, the Great Wall and the Taihang Mountains, as well as three World Cultural Heritage Sites of Yungang Grottoes, Mount Wutai and Pingyao Ancient City, enjoy wide recognition in China and across the world.

Li Xiaolu, vice-president of Xband Tourism Group, a Shanghai-based company running homestays, attended the conference. She said that Shanxi should differentiate itself from other



Aided with digital and modern lighting technologies, a show is staged at the opening ceremony of the ninth Shanxi Tourism Development Conference on June 27. SHI XIAOBO / FOR CHINA DAILY

regions by mapping out a unique tourism development model.

"Shanxi should make an organic combination of its cultural and natural resources to present a picture of Shanxi that is different from other regions," Li said. "And tailor-made products should be presented to meet the diversified needs of tourists."

Wei Xiaolan, chief expert of the World Tourism Cities Federation and chairman of the China Leisure Association, a branch of the China Tourism Association, said that local historical and cultural resources need to be reinterpreted to boost the development of Shanxi's tourism industry.

"Getting the local history and culture to tell stories can increase a destination's appeal to tourists, arousing their interests in exploring a province with a history of

more than 5,000 years," Wei said.

The expert added that tourist demands have diversified in recent years. Many are not content with just sightseeing.

"With an upgraded level of education, people are more willing to find something 'humanistic' on their trips," Wei said. "They'd like to experience local lives and tap into local history."

Shanxi has made initial attempts to integrate tourism with culture. The integration has become a new trend for the province's tourism industry.

One such example is for tourist destinations to host festivals and shows based on local cultural resources.

In the ancient city of Pingyao in central Shanxi, for instance, the celebration of Chinese New Year demonstrates how the festival was

celebrated in history and in today's Shanxi. The monthlong event features ancient rituals that are still alive in local communities, like paying tribute to various gods and ancestors, exorcising devils and selecting specific foods for each day of the lunar month.

In the conference's host city of Datong, there are shows centering on the famed Yungang Grottoes and the Great Wall.

One of shows was presented at the ninth tourism conference. It told how the Buddhist cave art of Yungang Grottoes came about and the art's evolution as it spread throughout the country and East Asia.

With the aid of digital and modern lighting technologies, the show began with a descending light-rendered Kushan Empire prince who brought to life a blue

bird on an ancient bronze utensil called *zun*. Upon its revival, the bird soared to the sky.

The Kushan Empire was an ancient state located in Central Asia. From the first to the third century, the empire played an important role in the spread of the Buddhist religion and arts to China.

The route of Buddhism spreading to China is in line with the ancient Silk Road. Originating in India, Buddhism was introduced to China and developed through a fusion with Chinese culture. This evolution is demonstrated by the cave sculptures and statue arts along the route of the religion's dissemination.

The evolution shows distinctive features of inheritance and development according to time and space.

The Central Asian region with

Kushan at the core was the first leg of the dissemination. Its cave sculpture art kept many of the Indian identities that display an infusion of local and even ancient Greek elements, which ushered in a sculptural style called Gandhara.

Inheritance of art styles can be seen along the route from west to east, but in a gradual transformation featuring fewer original and more local Chinese elements.

Following the Mogao Grottoes in Northwest China's Gansu province, Yungang Grottoes, which began construction in the fifth century, interpreted Buddhist cave art with a distinctive Chinese character.

As a result, Yungang Grottoes played an important role among early East Asian Buddhist grottoes and had a far-reaching influence on Buddhist cave art in China and East Asia.

The light show's symbolic meaning is clear, with the Kushan prince representing its origin and inheritance, the bronze bird symbolizing the incorporation of Chinese elements and the bird's soaring flight marking the development of the religion and art.

On the sidelines of tourism conference, Liu Shuguang, secretary-general of the China Museums Association, praised Datong's efforts in making museums a vital venue for tourists and locals to learn about the history and culture of the city.

Speaking at a forum on the sustainable development of museums, he said Datong is virtually "a city of museums". He said there are many cities in Shanxi playing a similar role in helping people learn about the brilliant culture of the nation.

He added that the combination of tourism and culture has helped Shanxi's tourism industry grow in a sustainable manner.

Yuan Zhaohui, Su Xiaochen and Zheng Na contributed to this story.

Paving ways across city cluster key to province

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Construction of a dense road network will be a crucial component in the development of a city cluster in central Shanxi province of North China, according to a local official.

Consisting of the city of Taiyuan, its southern neighbor Jinzhong and northern neighbor Xinzhou, the cluster is the centerpiece of the development strategy launched by provincial authorities in 2021, according to Guo Bingfu, chief of the Shanxi Department of Transport.

Shanxi launched an urban integration program for Taiyuan and Xinzhou in 2021, in accordance with the central government's requirements. In March of that year, the State Council released a guideline for the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), requiring Shanxi to foster a city cluster in its central region.

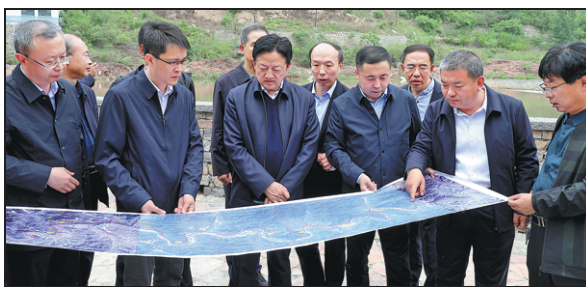
The cluster is proposed to host industries relocated from the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

Grasping the opportunity, the Shanxi government proposed to develop the Taiyuan-Xinzhou Integrated Economic Zone in the months that followed.

An earlier program, launched in 2010, had paired Taiyuan and Jinzhong. The Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone, currently the largest integrated development zone in Shanxi, links the two cities.

According to Guo, improving transport facilities is a significant part of Shanxi's development program. He said the provincial government released a specific plan last year for the city cluster's transport development, announcing that more roads will be constructed.

The schedule calls for Taiyuan,



Officials check a blueprint for road projects in central Shanxi. MA KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Jinzhong and Xinzhou to be linked to other regions of the nation by 11 expressways and 14 national highways by the end of the 14th Five-Year Plan, and there will be a denser road network connecting the three with neighboring cities within the province.

Total fixed asset investment in road construction for the three cities will amount to 439 billion yuan (\$60.63 billion) during the 14th Five-Year Plan, which is expected to result in an addition of more than

4,500 kilometers of highways by the end of 2025. Both figures account for more than a half of Shanxi's total of planned road length and investment during that term.

Of the planned projects, 19 with total investment of 118.2 billion yuan and a total length of 1,080 km are now under construction, according to Guo. Another 18 projects with combined investment of 120.1 billion yuan and a total length of 1,321 km will start construction later this year, the official said.

Expo puts characteristic industries center stage

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Less than 10 months after it launched a strategy to develop characteristic towns or counties with specialty industries, Shanxi hosted an expo dedicated to these towns, showcasing development achievements and helping them seek new cooperative partners.

The event, officially called the first Shanxi Investment Expo for Characteristic Towns, was held in the northern Shanxi city of Datong from June 28 to July 2.

A total 92 provincial or city-level characteristic towns displayed their products and highlighted business opportunities at the five-day expo. Business representatives from across the country attended the expo to place orders and sign deals for cooperation with exhibitors.

The government of Shanxi announced its first batch of 10 characteristic towns in Sept 14, 2022, marking the inauguration of the development campaign in the province. In the months to follow, various cities in Shanxi announced their own city-level characteristic towns.

Developing towns, counties and districts with characteristic industries is a strategy in Shanxi which aims to create economic engines that accelerate high-quality industrial growth locally.

At the expo, these characteristic locales displayed their development over the past 10 months.

Representatives from Daixian, a county known for yellow wine, told visitors that the county has 11 projects related to the industry

planned or under construction since September 2022. An industrial cluster encompassing grain farming, winemaking, sales and tourism is also under construction and seeking investors from across the country.

The county of Wanrong, which is known for its concrete admixture, was showing how a niche product can develop into an industry with great market and investment potential.

According to the county's representatives, the admixture, or additive agents in various forms, is used to closely bind cement, sand and gravel together to improve the performance of concrete in erosion resistance, heat insulation and strength.

The county is now home to 93 concrete admixture producers. They produce more than 1 million metric tons of products a year, with a combined output value of more than 4 billion yuan (\$552.4 million).

Supported by 18 corporate technological centers and other research and development facilities, Wanrong's concrete admixture industry is among the strongest in China, with products sold throughout the country and to more than 30 countries and regions worldwide.

The county aims for the concrete admixture industry to exceed 600 manufacturers and offer jobs to more than 100,000 people in the medium term.

Su Xiaochen, Yuan Zhaohui and Zheng Na contributed to this story.

Changzhi's growth powered by much more than coal

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Through its successful fostering of high-tech industries, Changzhi, a traditional coal-mining city in Shanxi province, is poised to become a national demonstrative city for innovation.

Newly added to the list of advanced facilities that have helped to transform Changzhi into a local innovation powerhouse are China's first production line for producing artificial hearts and the plants for battery cells with a photo-electricity conversion ratio of 23 percent and deep ultraviolet LED devices with advanced sterilization capabilities.

Even the traditional coal industry has been diversifying, forming an extensive industry chain to cover chemicals and new materials.

Chen Erdong, secretary of the Changzhi committee of the Communist Party of China, said the driving force behind the city's transformation is a concentrated effort to vie for nationwide support in talent, technology and other resources.

Chen headed a delegation to visit Shanghai and Zhejiang province in mid-April, looking for new partners and seeking to consolidate existing



Robots are used for producing electronic products at a plant in Changzhi. LI NING / FOR CHINA DAILY

agreements with local research institutions, universities and experts.

In Shanghai, the delegation visited the famed Shanghai Jiao Tong University, a long-standing partner of Changzhi. The university's leaders agreed to enhance and deepen their collaboration, especially in the research and development of high-performance photovoltaic batteries and high-speed maglev train motors.

In Hangzhou, Zhejiang, the delegation met with Ye Zhizhen, a Zhejiang University professor and

member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Ye agreed to lead a team to Changzhi and help in its planning for low-carbon development.

Chen said introducing intelligent resources from the rest of the country is a practical approach to Changzhi's high-quality development, adding that the city does not have a deep talent pool for its desired high-tech development. "So we put more, or at least similar, emphasis on attracting talents and technologies than on drawing

investment," said the Party chief.

Chen noted that experts from outside Changzhi have helped to build a number of technological innovation facilities in the city, including five State-level, 70 provincial-level and 179 city-level innovation platforms, which have helped local manufacturers grow into competitive high-tech companies.

According to a 2022 survey by the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China on the performance of the nation's innovation-driven cities, Changzhi saw the addition of 11 innovation platforms at or above the provincial level, ranking it first among all cities in Shanxi.

The combined R&D investment made by local enterprises of designated size — those with annual sales revenue of more than 20 million yuan (\$2.77 million) — reached 2.19 billion yuan last year, an increase of 38.6 percent. That growth rate ranked it second in the province, according to the survey.

Changzhi also saw the addition of 40 nationally accredited high-tech enterprises last year, boosting its total to 264.

Li Jiaming contributed to this story.



Businesspeople and officials visit the first Shanxi Investment Expo for Characteristic Towns. WANG RUIRUI / FOR CHINA DAILY